

Grand Traverse County Commission Invocation Policy

Purpose

The United States Supreme Court has determined that pre-session legislative prayer may be conducted consistent with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The permissible purpose of such prayer, as stated by the Supreme Court, is "to lend gravity to public proceedings and to acknowledge the place religion holds in the lives of many private citizens." *Town of Greece, N.Y. v Galloway*, 572 US 565, 587 (2014). This prayer opportunity may not be used, however, "to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief." *Marsh v Chambers*, 463 US 783, 794-95 (1983).

The Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners (hereinafter "the Board") desires to enact an Invocation Policy to allow legislative prayer at certain of its meetings, consistent with prevailing court decisions in the United States Supreme Court and the 6th Federal Circuit Court. The purpose of This Policy, consistent with authoritative case law, is to: lend gravity to the Board proceedings, invite those present and watching to reflect on shared values, to encourage civility, and to encourage sound and ethical decision making by the Board.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board hereby adopts this Invocation Policy;

1. [Invocation Opportunity](#)

An opportunity for invocation will be provided at the public County Commission Board meetings which are described in Board Rule of Order 2.2. This opportunity will occur prior to the Pledge of Allegiance and will be provided consistent with subsection 2 of This Policy.

2. [Scheduling Procedure](#)

a. All elected and currently serving Grand Traverse County commissioners will be eligible to be a member of a rotating group of commissioners who will either (1) provide the invocation or (2) delegate his or her rotating opportunity for invocation to his or her chosen individual.

b. A list of commissioners who are members of this rotating group will be maintained by County Administration.

c. An elected and currently serving commissioner becomes a member of the rotating list by making a written request to County Administration for membership on the list. There is no other qualification, oath, promise, or requirement required for membership on the list. No questions may be asked about the religion, creed, or spiritual beliefs of the commissioner and said beliefs are not a factor in presence on the rotating list.

d. Once on the rotating list, a commissioner is to be removed once no longer a member of the Board or when said commissioner makes a written request to County Administration to be removed from the rotation.

e. The order of commissioners on the rotating list will be assigned randomly and reasonable efforts will be made so that each member on the rotation will be provided an equal opportunity to provide invocations or to delegate the provision of invocations.

f. The rotating list shall be collected and, if reasonably possible, the order of the rotation shall be disbursed prior to the meeting following the Organizational Meeting.

g. If a commissioner requests presence on the rotation after the list has first been made, he or she will be given a random assignment which will begin during the next start of the rotation.

3. [Content](#)

a. An invocation must not be used to proselytize or advance any one faith or belief or to disparage any other faith or belief.

b. An invocation must not be used to threaten condemnation to any group of people.

c. The stated purpose of this policy is to be considered by each commissioner when making the invocation or by the commissioner when choosing his or her delegate to provide an invocation.

d. There shall be no other restriction related to the content of the invocation.

e. This includes the option of a commissioner or his or her delegate to say nothing at all when it is that commissioner's or his or her delegate's opportunity to provide an invocation.

4. [Voluntary Participation](#)

a. No commissioner or member of the public may be required to be present during the invocation. No commissioner or member of the public shall be prevented or reprimanded for leaving prior to or during the invocation.

b. No commissioner or member of the public may be required to participate in any invocation. No adverse action may be taken against any individual for refusing or neglecting to participate in an invocation.

c. Consistent with County Board Rule 6.3.1, adverse action against any person shall only be taken for an actual breach of the peace committed at the meeting.

d. Commissioners or members of the public who remain present during the invocation should be respectful to the commissioner or his or her delegate who is providing the invocation.

5. [Time Limitation](#)

An invocation is limited to no more than 3 minutes unless prior approval has been requested and granted by a majority of Board members elected and serving.

6. [Respect for Religious Diversity](#)

This policy is intended to acknowledge and express the respect of the Board for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced in Grand Traverse County. No faith or religious denomination is intended to be favored or preferred by This Policy.

Adopted this 16th day of January, 2019.